

The child victim / child perpetrator discourse dichotomy

Annina Heini, Lauren Devine, Stephen Parker (Centre for Language and Law)

Public discourse about violent crimes involving child victims and perpetrators is a powerful tool that shapes society's conceptualisation of children and *ergo* their treatment in legal contexts.

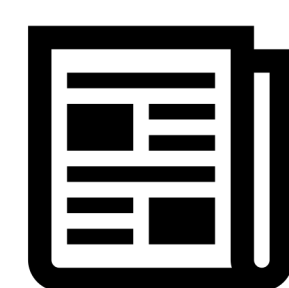
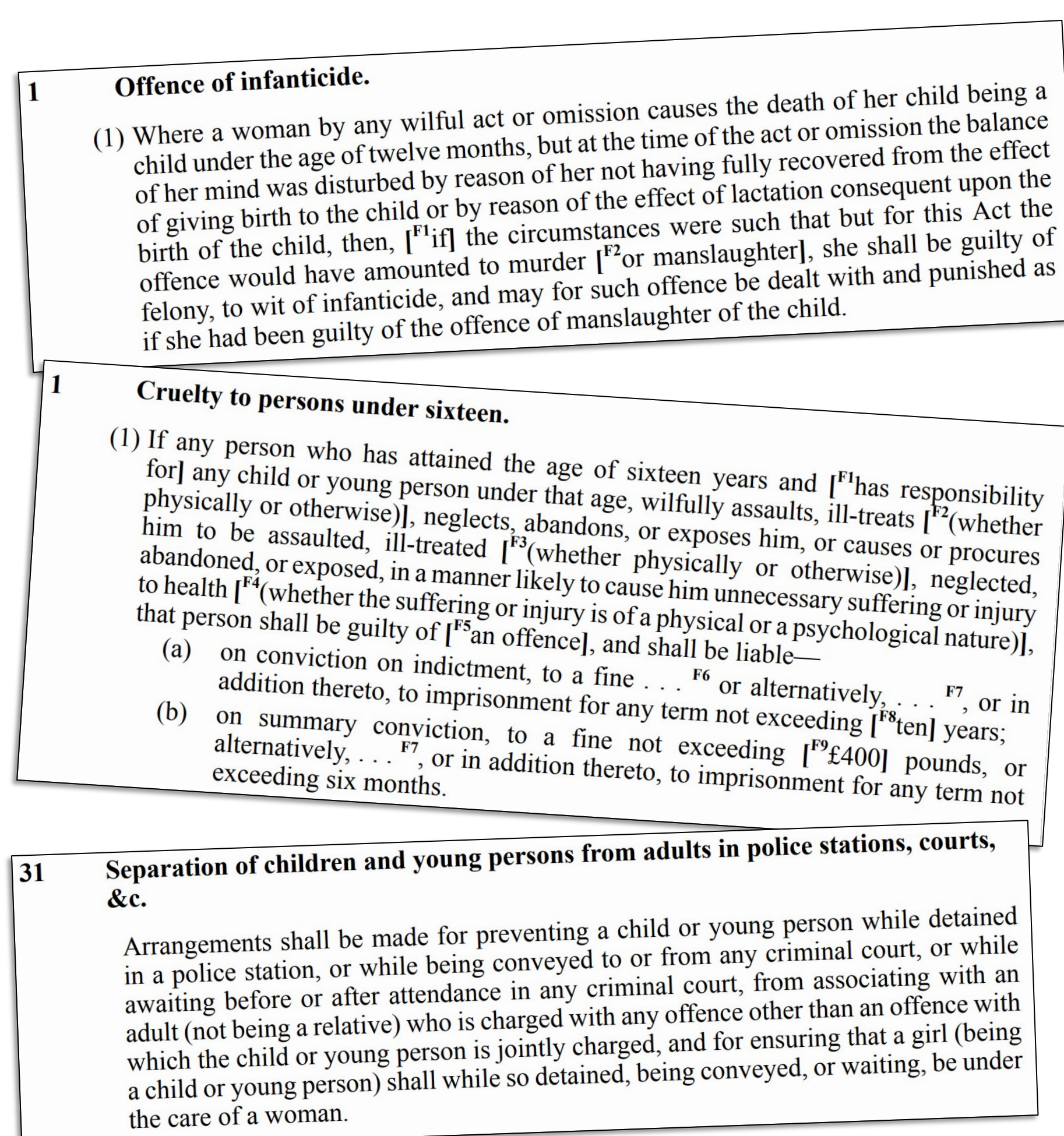
This is closely connected with concepts surrounding (criminal) responsibility, blame, and empathy, which in turn may influence members of the public in decision-making positions (e.g. jury members) and ultimately policymakers.

The aim of the project is to gain a comprehensive understanding of how language shapes our notion of children as victims and perpetrators. The following data will be collected:



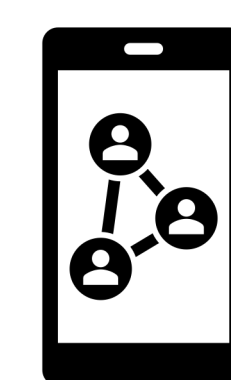
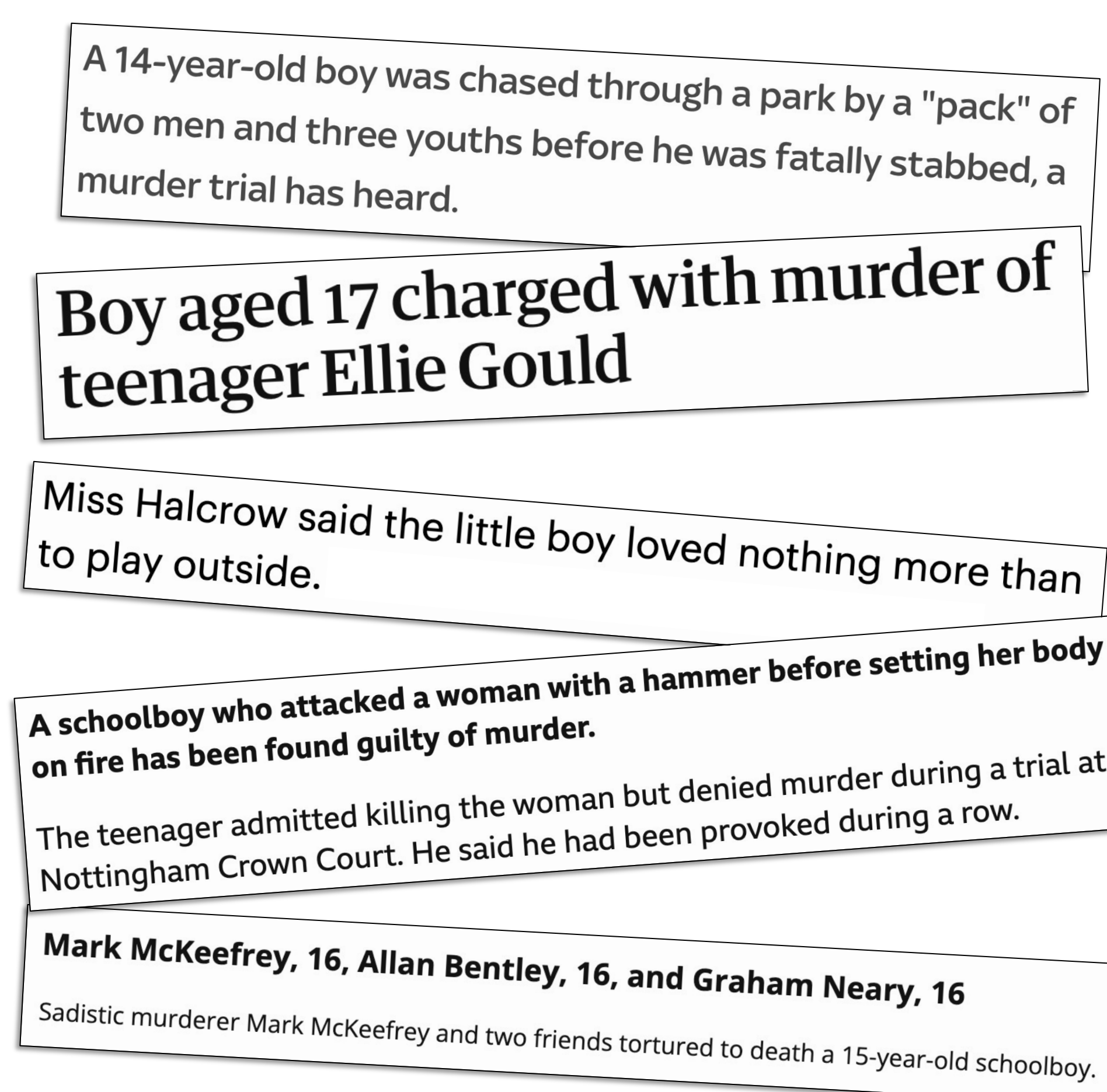
Law & policy documents

outlining the treatment of child victims and perpetrators in the criminal justice system



News articles

from broadsheet and tabloid newspapers reporting on three recent cases with child victims and three cases with child perpetrators



Social media posts

from Twitter in reaction to news stories about the six chosen cases and posts containing key terms associated with the cases (e.g. victims' / perpetrators' names)



Data

Separate corpora for the three data discourse types, each consisting of data pertaining to child victims and child perpetrators

Methods

- Keyness analysis to identify salient terms across the three discourse type corpora in terms of frequency
- Usage of identified terms (concordance lines, collocational patterns)
- Investigation of specific terms relating to context

